

Message Text

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PAGE 01 LISBON 02600 01 OF 02 081956Z

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 LISBON 2600

E.O. 11652: GDS

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SUBJ: POWER STRUGGLE

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SUMMARY: TWO WEEKS AFTER PORTUGAL'S FIRST FREE ELECTIONS IN 48 YEARS, THE UNEXPECTEDLY STRONG SHOWING OF THE DEMOCRATIC PARTIES HAS LED TO MORE RAPID AND PROFOUND CHANGE IN THE DELICATE AND UNSTABLE POLITICAL SCENE THAN ANY OF THE PLAYERS HAD ANTICIPATED. IN THIS STATE OF POLITICAL DISEQUILIBRIUM, THE PS FINDS ITSELF ON THE VERGE OF PUSHING THE AFM TOO FAR. THE PCP IS

FRIGHTENED BY THE PS RESURGENCE AND ALSO FEARFUL OF A FULL SEIZURE OF POWER BY THE AFM SHOULD IT WISH TO END TO WHAT IT CONSIDERS PARTY SQUABBLING. THE AFM RADICALS ARE PONDERING (AND PER-
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PAGE 02 LISBON 02600 01 OF 02 081956Z

HAPS PLOTTING) ON HOW TO DEAL WITH THE UNANTICIPATED DEMOCRATIC

CHALLENGE TO THEIR POLITICAL HEGEMONY. WITH THE PRESIDENT STRENGTHENED, THE PM WEAKENED, RADM ROSA COUTINHO APPARENTLY PREPARING TO SEEK ONE OF THE TOP JOBS BUT STILL A POLITICAL QUESTION MARK, AND THE ECONOMY GOING DOWNHILL FAST, PLUS LACK OF DISCIPLINE IN ARMED FORCES, THE INGREDIENTS FOR A HIGHLY VOLATILE POLITICAL MIXTURE ARE ALL IN PLACE. END SUMMARY.

1. SOCIALIST STRATEGY AFTER ELECTION: FOLLOWING THE UNEXPECTEDLY LARGE SOCIALIST VICTORY IN THE ELECTIONS, SOCIALIST SECRETARY-GENERAL MARIO SOARES HAD DECIDED TO TAKE A LOW PROFILE POSITION, NOT THROW THE VICTORY IN THE FACE OF HIS COMMUNIST AND FELLOW TRAVELLING MDP COALITION PARTNERS, OR MAKE IT ANY MORE OBVIOUS THAN IT ALREADY WAS THAT THE PEOPLE HAD MASSIVELY IGNORED THE IMPLICIT ARMED FORCES MOVEMENT (AFM) APPEAL FOR BLANK VOTES. REFTEL A REPORTED HOW SOARES CONFIDANTE, SA MACHADO, DESCRIBED THE SOCIALIST STRATEGY OF LETTING THE NEW "POLITICAL DYNAMIC" WORK ITSELF OUT THROUGH SPECIFIC ISSUES AS THEY AROSE IN THE GOVERNMENT, THE COUNCIL OF MINISTERS, AND THE REVOLUTIONARY COUNCIL.

2. SOCIALIST STRATEGY OVERTAKEN BY EVENTS: ALMOST IMMEDIATELY THE SOCIALIST STRATEGY STARTED TO COME APART. IN SOME MEASURE THIS WAS DUE TO CHURLISH FASHION IN WHICH THE AFM ATTEMPTED TO EXPLAIN AWAY THE RESULTS AND THE SOUR GRAPES ATTITUDE OF THE COMMUNIST PARTY, MOST PARTICULARLY ITS LEADER, IN DOWNPLAYING THE ELECTION RESULTS AND ATTACKING THE PS. ON THE OTHER HAND, IT WAS PROBABLY NEVER POSSIBLE IN A PARTY AS UNDISCIPLINED AS THE SOCIALIST TO EXPECT THE MORE MILITANT MEMBERS TO STAY IN LINE WITH THE LEADERSHIP'S STRATEGY OF RESTRAINT. IN ANY CASE, THE COMMUNIST PROVOCATIONS AND THE NATURAL TEMPTATION OF PS MEMBERS TO POINT OUT THE OBVIOUS AND EVEN TO CROW A BIT ABOUT THE PCP DEFEAT PROVED TO BE TOO MUCH.

3. THE DAY AFTER ELECTIONS RESULTS BECAME KNOWN, THE UNRAVELING BEGAN. IN RAPID SUCCESSION THE FOLLOWING EVENTS TOOK PLACE:

-----SUNDAY, APRIL 27: SOARES WAS SUBJECTED TO THREE HOURS OF A COMMUNIST-LINING RADIO INTERVIEW. HE RESPONDED SHARPLY. CONFIDENTIAL

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PAGE 03 LISBON 02600 01 OF 02 081956Z

-----MONDAY, APRIL 29: A SOARES NEWSPAPER INTERVIEW MADE IT CLEAR THAT HE CONSIDERED ELECTION A BIG DEFEAT FOR THE COMMUNISTS AND MDP. PS LEADER SALGADO ZENHA MADE THE SAME POINTS IN TELEVISION ROUNDTABLE WITH PCP LEADER OCTAVIO PATO.

-----TUESDAY, APRIL 30: PS PARTY NEWSPAPER CAME OUT WITH HARD LINE AGAINST PCP.

-----WEDNESDAY, APRIL 30: SOARES GOT REVOLUTIONARY COUNCIL TO AGREE TO PERMIT ONLY PRESIDENT, PRIME MINISTER, AND INTER-

SINDICAL TO SPEAK AT MAY DAY RALLY. PARTY LEADERS WERE NOT PERMITTED TO SPEAK. CUNHAL, WHO WAS ANXIOUS TO USE MAY 1 AS OCCASION FOR RECOVERY FROM PCP ELECTION DEFEAT WAS ENRAGED.

-----THURSDAY, MAY 1: AT GIANT MAY DAY RALLY, SOARES, ZENHA, AND OTHER PS LEADERS WERE PHYSICALLY PREVENTED BY INTERSINDICAL FROM TAKING THEIR PLACES ON SPEAKERS' PLATFORM AT THE RALLY.

-----FRIDAY, MAY 2: COMMUNIQUE FLEW BACK AND FORTH BETWEEN PCP AND PS OVER MAY 1 INCIDENT. SOCIALISTS, WITH NO HELP FROM THE MEDIA, WERE ABLE TO ORGANIZE A SPUR OF THE MOMENT PROTEST RALLY WHICH TOOK PLACE THAT EVENING AND ATTRACTED A VOCIFEROUS AND ANGRY GROUP OF PS MEMBERS ESTIMATED AS HIGH AS 50,000.

4. SOARES-CUNHAL SUMMIT: THE POLEMICS CONTINUED OVER THE WEEKEND AND UNEXPECTEDLY REACHED A CLIMAX WHEN THE PCP INVITED THE SOCIALISTS TO A SUMMIT MEETING AT PCP HEADQUARTERS. SOARES AGREED TO ATTEND, AND ON MAY 5 MET WITH PCP LEADER CUNHAL ON THE PCP'S TURF. THE MEETING RESULTED IN A BLAND COMMUNIQUE AND AN AGREEMENT TO CONTINUE MEETING.

5. POLITICAL OBSERVERS IMMEDIATELY WANTED TO KNOW WHY THE PCP HAD TAKEN THE INITIATIVE IN CALLING THE MEETING, WHY SOARES AGREED, AND WHY HE WAS WILLING TO GO TO PCP HEADQUARTERS INSTEAD OF INSISTING THAT CUNHAL COME TO HIM (THE "CANOSSAGANG" SYNDROME). EMBASSY SOURCES IN THE PS AND PPD LEADERSHIP TELL US THAT COMMUNISTS CALLED THE MEETING BECAUSE PCP WAS AFRAID THE DISPUTE WAS GETTING OUT OF HAND AND THAT THEY HAD OVERPLAYED THEIR HAND ON MAY 1 (REF B.) THE COMMUNISTS FEARED THAT AFM WOULD GET ANGRY AND MAKE A MOVE TO ELIMINATE THE FRACTIOUS PARTIES FROM AN ACTIVE ROLE IN GOVERNMENT. THE PCP, ALTHOUGH IT HAS STRONG SUPPORTERS IN THE AFM, ALSO KNOWS THAT SOME AFM MEMBERS (RIGHTLY) SEE IT AS A RIVAL POWER CENTER WHICH MUST NOT BE

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 04 LISBON 02600 01 OF 02 081956Z

ALLOWED TO BECOME TOO STRONG. THEREFORE, PARTY FELT IT PRUDENT TO ATTEMPT TO DEFUSE THE DISPUTE WITH THE SOCIALISTS.

6. SOARES ACCEPTED THE INVITATION BECAUSE HE TOO, BASED ON HIS ORIGINAL STRATEGY OF GOING SLOW IN TAKING ADVANTAGE OF THE NEW POLITICAL ENVIRONMENT CREATED BY THE ELECTIONS, FELT THE NEED TO DE-ESCALATE. HE WAS CONCERNED ABOUT THE DANGER OF THE AFM LEADERSHIP TURNING MORE ANTI-SOCIALIST THAN IT WAS ALREADY INCLINED TO BE. SOARES, ACCORDING TO HIS STAFF, AGREED TO MEET WITH THE PCP AT PCP HEADQUARTERS BECAUSE HE IS NOT BY NATURE PROTOCOL CONSCIOUS BUT, MORE IMPORTANTLY, BECAUSE HE WISHED TO MAKE A CLEAR DEMONSTRATION TO THE AFM THAT HE WAS WILLING TO GO MORE THAN HALF WAY IN CALMING DOWN THE DISPUTE. SOARES IS FULLY CONSCIOUS OF THE DIM VIEW MANY AFM MEMBERS TAKE

OF PARTISAN POLITICAL STRUGGLES.

7. WOOING THE AFM: QUERIED ABOUT WHETHER SOARES COULD OR WOULD MAKE ATTEMPT TO WOO THE AFM AND BREAK DOWN THE HOSTILITY THAT EXISTS BETWEEN THE AFM AND THE SOCIALISTS, SOARES' FRIENDS HAVE POINTED OUT TO US THAT SOARES DOES NOT HAVE MUCH PATIENCE FOR THIS SORT OF THING, DOES NOT THINK THE MILITARY SHOULD BE IN POLITICS IN THE FIRST PLACE, AND DOES NOT WANT TO GIVE THEM ANY ENCOURAGEMENT TO STAY IN. THUS, IT IS RATHER UNLIKELY THAT SOARES WILL HIMSELF MAKE AN EFFORT ALONG THOSE LINES OR ENCOURAGE HIS COHORTS TO DO SO.

8. THREAT TO DEMOCRATIC PARTIES: THE TWO BIG DEMOCRATIC PARTIES, PPD AND PS, ARE CONCERNED ABOUT THEIR FUTURE IN TODAY'S FLUID AND UNCERTAIN SITUATION. THEY ARE ACUTELY AWARE OF THE HOSTILITY OF THE LEFT WING OF THE AFM. THEY FEEL THAT, AT THE VERY LEAST, MILITARY RADICALS ARE HOPING THAT A PROVOCATION WILL APPEAR OR BE MANUFACTURED TO ENABLE THEM TO MOVE AGAINST THE PARTIES. ALTHOUGH THEY HAVE NO EVIDENCE TO SUPPORT THIS FEAR, EXCEPT SOME HINTS

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PAGE 01 LISBON 02600 02 OF 02 082035Z

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 LISBON 2600

BY GOP FIGURES THAT ANOTHER RIGHT-WING MOVE AGAINST THE REGIME IS EXPECTED, THE DEMOCRATIC PARTIES FEAR THAT THE AFM MAY COOK UP A PHONY PLOT WHICH WILL ALLOW THEM TO ELIMINATE THE CDS AND PPD AS LEGAL PARTIES. THIS WOULD LEAVE THE PS TOTALLY EXPOSED ON THE RIGHT WING OF THE POLITICAL SPECTRUM AND WOULD FORCE IT FURTHER LEFT OR RESULT IN ITS PROGRESSIVE DESTRUCTION BY THE PRO-COMMUNIST LEFT.

9. THE IMMEDIATE FUTURE: IN A MAY 7 PRESS CONFERENCE, SOARES MADE IT CLEAR THAT HIS TERMS FOR AN UNDERSTANDING WITH THE COMMUNISTS INCLUDE THE FOLLOWING THREE CONDITIONS: (A) FREEDOM OF THE PRESS AND THE ELIMINATION OF BIAS FROM THE MEDIA, (B) ELECTIONS IN THE UNIONS, AND (C) ELECTIONS IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT JURISDICTIONS THROUGHOUT PORTUGAL. THESE TERMS ARE ANATHEMA TO THE PCP BECAUSE ACCEPTING (A) AND (B) WOULD EFFECTIVELY DESTROY ITS POWER BASE IN PORTUGAL (REF C). FOR THE APPEARANCE OF UNITY WITHIN THE COALITION GOVERNMENT, HOWEVER, THE PCP MAY PAY LIP SERVICE TO THE SOCIALIST CONDITIONS.

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PAGE 02 LISBON 02600 02 OF 02 082035Z

10. THE PPD ALSO SEES THE THREE SOCIALIST DEMANDS NOT ONLY AS ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS IN THE PRESERVATION OF DEMOCRACY IN PORTUGAL BUT AS PRIME INDICATORS OF WHERE THE GOVERNMENT IS HEADED, THE RELATIVE POWER OF THE LEFTISTS IN THE REVOLUTIONARY COUNCIL, AND THE WEIGHT ACCORDED TO THE PCP IN THE GOP.

11. POSITION OF PRESIDENT: SOURCES IN SOARES' OFFICE HAVE TOLD US OF THEIR FEAR THAT COSTA GOMES, AS THE PRINCIPAL BULWARK AGAINST THE ANTI-DEMOCRATIC FORCES IN THE GOP AND AFM, WILL BE THE OBJECT OF AN ATTEMPT TO PUSH HIM OUT OF OFFICE BY THE AFM RADICALS. THERE IS NO DOUBT AT ALL IN THE MINDS OF THE DEMOCRATIC PARTIES WHERE COSTA GOMES STANDS. THE PRESIDENT'S MAY DAY SPEECH WITH ITS FORTH-RIGHT SUPPORT FOR THE ELECTIONS MADE IT OBVIOUS TO ALL THAT COSTA GOMES IS OPPOSED TO THOSE WHO WOULD IGNORE OR IMPUGN THE ELECTION RESULTS.

12. POSITION OF COUTINHO AND GONCALVES: BOTH THE SOCIALISTS AND POPULAR DEMOCRATS ARE PUZZLED BY THE RECENT ROLE OF RADM ROSA COUTINHO, WHOM THEY ARE UNABLE TO ACCURATELY PLACE IN THE POLITICAL SPECTRUM, BUT WHO THEY ARE SURE IS A POWERFUL AND AMBITIOUS MAN. THEY SEE COUTINHO AS THE MOST LIKELY REPLACEMENT FOR GONCALVES AS PRIME MINISTER. GONCALVES, WEAKENED AND DISCOURAGED BY THE DISASTEROUS ELECTION SHOWING OF HIS MDP ALLIES AND CONFIDANTES, APPEARS TO THE DEMOCRATIC PARTIES TO BE IN A MORE VULNERABLE POSITION THAN HE HAS EVER BEEN SINCE TAKING OFFICE. BUT THE ANTI-PATHY BETWEEN THE SOCIALISTS AND COUTINHO REMAINS. ALTHOUGH SOARES HAS SEEN COUTINHO SEVERAL TIMES RECENTLY,

ALL THAT HE HAS BEEN ABLE TO GET OUT OF HIM IS "BIG SMILES" AND NO INFORMATION ON WHERE HE STANDS POLITICALLY.

13. POWER IN THE STREETS?: WITH THE BREAKDOWN IN DISCIPLINE WITHIN THE ARMED FORCES, THE WEAKNESS OF THE NON-DEMOCRATIC LEFT SO CLEARLY DEMONSTRATED IN THE ELECTIONS, AND THE MODERATE-RADICAL DIVERGENCE WITHIN THE ARMED FORCES, ALL SIDES ARE NERVOUS AS TO WHAT WOULD HAPPEN IF THE SOCIALISTS OR ANYONE ELSE DECIDED TO TAKE TO THE STREETS TO ACHIEVE THEIR DEMANDS. THE LARGE, VIRTUALLY SPONTANEOUS TURNOUT BY SOCIALISTS FOR MAY 2 DEMONSTRATION WAS CHASTENING EXPERIENCE FOR AFM RADICALS AND THE COMMUNISTS, WHO THOUGHT THEY ONLY THEIR FRIENDS COULD CONTROL THE STREETS. SHOULD THE SOCIALISTS DECIDE TO MAKE SUCH A MOVE, (UNLIKELY, BUT POSSIBLE IF THE RANK AND FILE GETS SUFFICIENTLY CONFIDENTIAL

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PAGE 03 LISBON 02600 02 OF 02 082035Z

FIRE UP) IT DOES NOT SEEM FEASIBLE FOR THE FORCES OF ORDER TO DO MUCH ABOUT IT. EQUALLY DANGEROUS AND EQUALLY UNPREDICTABLE WOULD BE A MOVE BY PCP AND ITS ALLIES, OR A CATALYTIC EVENT CREATED BY THE MRPP OR ONE OF THE OTHER ELECTORALLY INSIGNIFICANT BUT HIGHLY MILITANT PARTIES OF THE EXTREME LEFT.

14. ECONOMIC PROBLEMS: WITH BUSINESS CONFIDENCE STILL REELING FROM THE RAPID-FIRE NATIONALIZATIONS AFTER MARCH 11, THE ECONOMIC OUTLOOK IS BLEAK. INFLATION IS VERY HIGH, RESERVES ARE DECLINING RAPIDLY, EMIGRANT REMITTANCES ARE DOWN, NEW INVESTMENT HAS DROPPED TO VIRTUALLY NOTHING, AND EXTERNAL CREDITS HAVE DRIED UP. UNEMPLOYMENT IS HIGH AND INCREASING; IT WOULD BE A GOOD BIT WORSE IF THE GOV PERMITTED FIRMS TO LAY OFF WORKERS. MORE OMINOUSLY, STRIKES APPEAR TO BE INCREASING AND PCP, WHILE STILL SEEKING TO APPEAR AS ONLY TRUE AND FAITHFUL ALLY OF AFM, IS ALSO BELIEVED TO BE GIVING SUB-ROSA ENCOURAGEMENT TO LABOR UNREST WHICH IS SWEEPING COUNTRY. THIS DUAL TACTIC MAY BE DESIGNED TO SHOW AFM THAT WHILE PCP LOST ELECTION IT HAS NOT LOST ABILITY TO CRIPPLE THE ECONOMY.

15. BOX SCORE: AS OF TODAY THE VARIOUS ELEMENTS OF THE PORTUGUESE POLITICAL SCENE LINE UP AS FOLLOWS:

-- PCP HAS OVEREXTENDED ITSELF AND BEEN EXPOSED AS A PARTY WHOSE LIMITED STRENGTH MAKES IT LOOK MORE LIKE A LATIN AMERICAN THAN EUROPEAN COMMUNIST PARTY. PCP IS NOW SEEKING SOME WAY TO GET BACK ON OFFENSIVE AND HAS THE CAPABILITY TO MAKE SOME DANGEROUS AND DESTABILIZING MOVES WHILE MAKING THE EFFORT.

-- PS IS MOVING FASTER THAN IT HAD PLANNED IN RESPONDING TO THE POST ELECTION POLITICAL DYNAMIC. SOARES IS TRYING TO BE CAUTIOUS AND NOT GET HIS ENEMIES IN THE PCP AND THE AFM ACTIVELY ENGAGED IN ALL OUT WARFARE AGAINST THE PS WHILE AT THE SAME TIME KEEPING THE INITIATIVE IN DEALING WITH THE COMMUNISTS.

-- THE RADICALS IN THE AFM ARE PONDERING, IF NOT PLOTTING, WHAT THEY CAN DO ABOUT THE UNEXPECTED STRENGTH OF THE SOCIALISTS.

THEIR QUESTION IS WHETHER TO RISK A MAJOR MOVE NOW TO ELIMINATE THE SOCIALISTS AS A VIABLE POWER CENTER OR FACE THE POSSIBLE EROSION OF THEIR POWER AS THE SOCIALISTS AND MILITARY MODERATES MAKE A STAND AGAINST THE TOTALITARIAN LEFT.

-- THE MODERATES IN THE AFM ARE GRADUALLY STICKING THEIR HEADS UP AGAIN AND MAY, ALTHOUGH THEY HAVE NOT DONE SO YET, BE WILLING TO CHALLENGE THE RADICAL DOMINANCE OF THE REVOLUTIONARY COUNCIL.
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PAGE 04 LISBON 02600 02 OF 02 082035Z

THEY HOPE TO BE ABLE TO BRING ALONG WITH THEM THE FENCE-SITTERS, THE IDEOLOGICALLY UNCOMMITTED, AND THE OPPORTUNISTS.

-- THE PRESIDENT HAS MADE A RECOVERY FROM HIS DANGEROUSLY EXPOSED POSITION AFTER MARCH 11, AND CAN NOW AGAIN IN HIS CHARACTERISTIC FASHION START THE PROCESS OF QUIETLY REINFORCING THE DEMOCRATIC ELEMENTS WITHIN THE ARMED FORCES AND IN THE GOVERNMENT. POST-ELECTION EVENTS HAVE MADE CLEAR HIS POSITION AS AN OBVIOUS BUT UNDECLARED SUPPORTER OF THE SOCIALISTS.

-- THE PRIME MINISTER IS WEAKENED BUT STILL COUNTS ON THE AFM RADICALS AND THE PCP. NEVERTHELESS HE IS NOW VULNERABLE TO A CHALLENGE.

-- RADM ROSA COUTINHO LOOKS MORE AND MORE LIKE A MAN WHO SEEKS ONE OF THE TOP JOBS. ACTIVE, OUTSPOKEN, AND EXUDING CONFIDENCE, ROSA COUTINHO'S POLITICS, GOALS, AND ALLIES REMAIN A BIG QUESTION MARK.

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